
Asbestos in the Home - Guidance for Tenants

This information addresses concerns and questions about asbestos in people's homes.

Asbestos fibres are very strong and resistant to heat and chemicals. This has led to their use in a wide range of building materials and products. Properties built or refurbished before 1999 are likely to use Asbestos Containing Materials (ACMs) although their peak usage was between 1950 and 1980. The vast majority of houses built during this time are more than likely to have had ACMs used during their construction. The most commonly found ACM is asbestos cement which can still be seen on many garages and sheds throughout the UK.

Why asbestos may be a problem?

Asbestos that is sealed and in good condition is not a hazard. However, when asbestos materials deteriorate with age or become damaged they can release fibres into the air. These fibres can be breathed deep into the lung causing possible damage and sometimes developing into an asbestos exposure are those that have disturbed it regularly as part of their work such as builders, plumbers and electricians. Health and safety regulations are now in force to protect these people.

Is everyone exposed to asbestos?

A low level of asbestos fibres exists in the air everywhere as asbestos was so widely used. Exposure to this low 'environmental' level is very unlikely to harm people's health. Levels of fibres may be higher inside buildings that contain ACMs especially if these products are damaged or deteriorating. Again it is unlikely that fibre levels will be high enough to damage health. If you have damaged asbestos materials within your home, you should seek advice on the appropriate action to take. The number to call for Impact Housing tenants is 01900- 842153. High short-term exposure to asbestos fibres can occur during DIY work that disturbs Asbestos Containing Materials/ For this reason do not carry out any DIY work to ACMs that may create dust such as drilling or sanding.



Where is asbestos found?

Building materials containing asbestos were widely used from 1930 to around 1980, and particularly from the 1960's onwards. So houses and flats built or refurbished at this time may contain asbestos materials. Asbestos has also been used in some heat-resistant household products, such as oven gloves and ironing boards. The use of asbestos in these products decreased greatly around the mid-1980's. Since 1999 the use of asbestos in most products has been banned. It is not always easy to tell whether a product contains asbestos as modern asbestos-free materials often look similar - remember it is usually older products that contain asbestos. The types of asbestos materials that may be found in homes are described below.



Insulating board (Asbestos content: 20-45 per cent)

Insulating board has been used for fire protection, heat and sound insulation. It is particularly common in 1960s and 1970s system-built housing and is found in materials such as ducts, infill panels, ceiling tiles, wall lining, bath panels and partitions. It is unlikely to be found in buildings constructed after 1982.

Asbestos lagging (Asbestos content: 55-100 per cent)

Asbestos lagging has been used for thermal insulation of pipes and boilers. It was widely used in public buildings and system built flats during the 1960s and 1970s in areas such as boiler houses and heating plants. Asbestos lagging is very rarely found in homes, especially those constructed after the mid 1970s. The use of asbestos for thermal insulation was banned in 1986.

Sprayed coating (Asbestos content: up to 85 per cent)

Sprayed asbestos coatings were used for fire protection of structural steel and are commonly found in system built flats during the 1960s. The coatings were mainly applied around the core of the building such as service ducts, lift shafts etc. Use stopped in 1974 and the spraying of asbestos has been prohibited since 1986. Sprayed asbestos has since been removed from many buildings, or sealed to prevent fibres being released.

Asbestos-cement products (Asbestos content: 10-15 per cent, sometimes up to 40 per cent.)

Asbestos-cement is the most widely used asbestos material. It is found in many types of building as profiled sheets for roofing and wall-cladding; in flat sheets and partition boards for linings to walls and ceilings; in bath panels; soffit boards, fire surrounds, flue pipes, cold water tanks and as roofing tiles and slates. It has been commonly used as roofing and cladding for garages and sheds and also in guttering and drainpipes. Use has declined since 1976, but asbestos cement was used up until 1999, particularly in roofing and cladding products. Asbestos cement products are unlikely to release high levels of fibres because of the way they are made, unless they are subject to extreme abrasion.

Other building materials and products

Asbestos has been used in a variety of other building materials; for example in decorative coatings such as textured paints and plasters. These are still widely in place but supply and application has been prohibited since 1988. Plastic floor tiles, cushion flooring, roofing felts, tapes, ropes, felts and blankets can also contain asbestos.

Heating appliances and domestic equipment

Asbestos was used in some warm air heating systems, electric storage heaters (up to 1976), in gas heaters and some early 'coal effect' gas fires. It has also been used in domestic equipment, such as oven gloves, ironing boards, seals on cooker doors and fire blankets, and in car brake linings and pads. Since 1976, British manufacturers have put labels on their products to show they contain asbestos and, after 1986, all products containing asbestos carry the European label. The supplier or manufacturer of a product may be able to tell you if it contains asbestos. Often homes built at the same time contain similar material-your neighbours may know if surveys have already been carried out.

The Asbestos Register

Impact Housing Association are surveying all their homes and have a register to list those found to contain asbestos materials. It records the type, location, and condition of the asbestos containing materials if present.

What should I do if I suspect there is asbestos in my home?

Asbestos materials in good condition that cannot readily be damaged are best left where they are because removal can lead to higher levels of fibres in the air for a period of time. Check the condition of asbestos materials from time to time to make sure they have not become damaged or started to deteriorate. Asbestos materials that are slightly damaged can sometimes be repaired by sealing or enclosing the material. It is not Government policy to remove all Asbestos Containing Materials: Asbestos materials that are badly damaged or deteriorating can release dust and should be removed. Some asbestos materials (sprayed asbestos, lagging or insulating boards) must always be removed by contractors with a special license issued by the Health and Safety Executive. These licensed contractors have to follow regulations to ensure asbestos is safely removed. Air monitoring may be carried out to check on the levels of airborne fibre.



Take care when doing DIY

If you have asbestos materials in your home, extra care should be taken when carrying out Do-it-Yourself work. If you think a material may contain asbestos, please ring Impact Housing Association on 01900 -842153 so that we can advise you.

DO NOT attempt work involving sprayed asbestos, lagging or insulating boards, as this must be undertaken by a licensed asbestos removal contractor. If you are working close to asbestos materials take the following precautions:

DO NOT drill, cut or disturb asbestos

DO NOT scrape or sand asbestos materials before painting and decorating. Some types of asbestos materials are very soft and can release large numbers of fibres if rubbed or scraped.

Remember, asbestos-containing products can look very similar to those not containing asbestos - if in doubt SEEK ADVICE.